

June 23 2024 - Rev Jo Smith

When storms and chaos threaten us and we are rendered helpless in the grip of fear and anxiety, as people of faith we cry out to God.

Our cry often reveals more about our fear and anxiety than our faith.

When the disciples cried out “Do you not care that we are about to perish?” it was not simply a question about their survival, it was a question about their value.

“Jesus, are we not important enough for you to save us?”

Does God care when our life is in chaos and the struggle is more than we can bear?

In today’s Gospel, the long hours of a busy and draining day are coming to a close. Jesus has spent the day teaching and attending to the needs of yet another large crowd who have gathered by the shore. Now as the day fades into the quiet of evening, the disciples get into the boat with Jesus and begin to row toward the opposite side of the lake of Gallilee. Imagine the gentle waves rocking the exhausted Jesus into sleep. A sudden, violent storm engulfs them, a familiar yet fearsome occurrence even for seasoned fishermen. The disciples, like us find the idea that Jesus is sleeping through the moments of our lives when we are most in danger to be, well frankly, astounding! Helpless and caught up in the whirlwind we wait Jesus to not only be wide awake but at the helm, taking control, ready to steer us through the watery chaos. When we sense his absence we become wracked with anxiety and fear.

In their panic, the disciples wake Jesus, crying out, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” This question reveals their deep fear and doubt, a sentiment many of us can relate to in our own life's storms.

Do you remember the last time you awoke at 3.00 am gripped by worry and fear? We all know what it is like to lie awake chewing on, choking on, our worst fears. We all know what it is to have our mind hijacked by the list of things that await our attention.

Underneath even the most mundane of our worries lurks our deeper existential anxiety: “Am I enough? Strong enough? Smart enough? Hardworking enough? Good enough?”

We all carry these questions deep within us, although they are closer to the surface at some times than others.

When the disciples in the storm wracked boat cried out to Jesus their question was not so much about their survival: “Jesus are we going to die, can you save us?”

It was more a question about their value: “Don't you care that we are about to perish?”

Jesus awakens, rebukes the wind, and commands the sea to be still. He then turns to the disciples, asking, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no trust?” In this moment, the disciples' fear shifts from the storm to a profound terror at the realization of Jesus' true power. They wonder

among themselves, “Who is this, that even the wind and the waves obey him?”

We tend to oscillate between seeing God as either a distant, mighty judge or a close, personal friend. But God’s true nature encompasses both transcendence and immanence. Jesus, fully God, commands the forces of nature yet chooses to be present with us, sharing in our human experience, our joys, and our sufferings. This duality helps us find meaning in our struggles, as God’s presence with us transcends mere problem-solving and enters into the realm of divine companionship.

When Jesus asked the disciples, “Where is your faith?” he was not condemning their fear but inviting them to reflect on God’s presence in their lives. Our faith does not shield us from life’s storms but helps us find meaning and strength within them. Jesus invites us to trust him not just in retrospect but in the moment, recognizing that he is with us even when the storm rages on.

In our lives, we may face unmet desires and unanswered prayers, leading us to question God’s care for us. Yet, God’s presence is not contingent on how our circumstances make us feel. Think about where Jesus was in the boat. In the stern. Behind the disciples. Think about how focussed they must have been on the work they had to do...the work that was in front of them. But Jesus was there. Present with them. Behind them. Out of view and perhaps out of mind. But there. Present with them. God’s love and faithfulness are constant, even when we don’t

perceive them. The story of Jesus calming the storm is a reminder that God is with us in our boats, enduring the storm alongside us.

The disciples' fear as they realise that Jesus has calmed the storm - this too mirrors our own fear. The storms in our own lives, the external tempests often amplify an internal, primal fear rooted in our sin and self-centeredness.

In thinking about what I am afraid of, one thing I kept thinking about is how fear is almost always small and self-centred. It makes us forget about others and focus on our own needs and self-preservation. It makes us cry out in the silence of our hearts "God, don't you care?" when things are not going the way we wish they would for us.

I'm not sure how many times I've read this storm at sea story from Mark without really paying attention to verse 29 And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. So here's a question of my own: What about the other boats? The people in those boats were experiencing the storm too. So maybe in their fear the disciples forgot about anyone but themselves. They wanted Jesus to help **them**, by acting toward **them** in a certain way.

Sometimes when we get so focused on how we think the story of our lives should look we forget about the other boats. Maybe we think the

story of God's power in our lives has to look a certain way for us when the fact is that sometimes God's power looks like the fact that there is actually a bigger and better story than the way we want things to be.

Our fear often narrows our focus, making us self-centered and blind to the broader story God is writing. We may forget that God's faithfulness extends beyond our immediate desires, encompassing a larger narrative that includes others' boats, other lives.

Ultimately, the story of Jesus calming the storm is about recognizing his divine authority and our need to trust in his presence. The better story is that Jesus was with the disciples in the water-logged and weather beaten boat, experiencing the same terrible storm, the same terrible waves, the same terrible danger.

The better story is that God is with us now, not controlling our lives and not always making things work out for us the way we think they should, but with us, and announcing PEACE.

It's a call to acknowledge our fears and to see beyond them, to trust in a God who is both mighty and intimately involved in our lives.

